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letter #1

Wanda Kaczynski
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July 5, 1991

Dear Ma—

Not long ago you invited me to write to you about my "adolescent pain", as you called it. I'm going to do so now, but I don't think you'll enjoy hearing what I have to say.

On June 14 you wrote me: "I feel bad that you are so intolerant of a brother whose feelings for you have always been so generous and loving. Your rejection of him has hurt him deeply." This is typical of the way I've been treated in the family, ever since my teens. Whenever I hurt someone else's feelings I am automatically treated as the bad boy — the fault is all on my side, and someone else in the family tells me I should go to the offended party and apologize. When someone else says or does something that hurts my feelings, they are never asked to apologize. (At any rate I have almost never received any apology for anything from any member of the family.) On the contrary, I have sometimes been asked to be "understanding" toward the person who has insulted me. For instance, in one case (during a winter I spent with you around 1970), after you had heaped a lot of unprovoked verbal abuse on my head, Dad came to me and told me that I should be tolerant of you because you were "under stress", blah blah blah. Apparently it is assumed that I am never under stress.

As for the assertion that Dave's feelings toward me "have always been so generous and loving", this just isn't true. He certainly has had generous

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and loving feelings for me, but there has always been an important counter-strain of envy and resentment toward me on his part. He has often expressed this in underhanded ways. I've already mentioned (in an earlier letter) how he refused to acknowledge Denis Du Bois's insulting behavior toward me. I could mention other incidents in which he wilfully embarrassed me or hurt my feelings, but it would take too much time to write them down here. And you'll remember what happened when Ellen Tarmichael (at Foam-Cutting Engineers) intentionally and cruelly hurt and humiliated me, and I retaliated by trying to embarrass her. Refusing to listen to my side of the story, Dave (as well as you and Dad) jumped down on me and treated me as if I were some kind of a monster. And even after I had fully explained to you what had happened, not one of you three apologized to me or said a single word in sympathy for my pain. To do Dave justice, I should mention that a couple of years later he did apologize to the extent of saying that he "felt horrible" about the incident. And more generally, while you and Dad were always essentially selfish people who never showed any real generosity toward anyone (except toward one another), Dave does have real generosity in his character. But, as already mentioned, there is an important counterstrain in his feelings toward me. He has an ego problem with respect to big brother, and though I tried to discuss these

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issues with him in letters a few years ago, he still persists in defending his ego against imaginary threats from big brother (though perhaps he never acknowledges this to himself), and I am just sick of it. For that and for various other reasons I just can't stand him any more.

I've read that there are certain families in which all the psychological burdens are thrown on one person. This certainly seems to have been true of our family. Through academic achievements I was expected to earn for you the prestige and status that you were too lazy to earn for yourself. I was used as a butt on which you and Dad could vent your frustrations through insults and verbal abuse. Whenever anything went wrong in interpersonal relations in our family, I usually got the blame. If I got into a shouting match with Dave, you and Dad would always throw on me the burden of keeping the peace. When I squabbled with Dave, you or Dad would start scolding me; I would say, "but Dave did such-and-such"; and you and Dad wouldn't even listen to me; you would interrupt me, saying, "that doesn't matter — you're older — you should be more mature." Yet you and Dad often got into shouting matches with me; apparently it never occurred to you that you were older and should be more mature.

The fact that I always automatically got the blame for anything that went wrong when Dave

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and I were together is neatly illustrated by what Dave said after he cut his hand. I suppose you remember what happened on that occasion. Dad gave each of us a glass squirt-bottle full of water to squirt each other with. We were happily engaged in doing just that when Dave climbed up on a canvas chair to squirt me from a better vantage point. I was just about to tell him that he'd better get down because he might fall — when he fell. I was several feet away from him and did nothing that could have contributed to his fall. Yet you reported to me that the doctors had reported to you that Dave had said, over and over, "Don't blame Teddy, don't blame Teddy". Why would he say that? Clearly because he knew that I usually got the blame for whatever happened.

This illustrates the generous aspect of Dave's feelings toward me. The opposite aspect of his feelings toward me is illustrated by what happened when I lost my tooth. You'll remember how I felt and reacted when Dave cut his hand — among other things, I wanted to give him my coin collection, which was my most precious possession. But when I came home with my tooth pulled out, Dave jeered at me for it.

It's certainly true that Dave had reason to resent me — I sometimes dominated him physically and often harrassed him verbally. In

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part this was because I was the defenseless victim of insults both from my parents and from the kids in school, so that I had a lot of frustrated anger that I tended to take out on Dave, especially since he had a type of personality that I probably would have found irritating in any case.

In your note of June 21 you wrote, "I don't like to make anybody feel bad. (Except, of course, my kids when they were young in the interest [mistakenly so] of correction and discipline.)"

The more you resort to rationalizations and evasions to excuse your treatment of me, the more I hate you. The insults you heaped on me were not honest but mistaken attempts at discipline, they were just uncontrolled outbursts of anger. Often the anger was not even a response to my behavior, since in many cases you would scream at me on the most trivial provocations. You once wrote me that your treatment of me was "not malicious". It wasn't calculatedly malicious. But the things you said to me were certainly full of malice. You can't possibly claim that you didn't know that the things you said to me would be painful. You said them because you knew they would be painful — your angry outbursts against me were acts of aggression and were intended to cause pain. By no stretch of the imagination can it be supposed that you actually believed this sort of thing to

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constitute a rational system of discipline.
There is no evidence whatever that you attempted to restrain your temper toward me. I can remember no instance in which you ever apologized for your behavior to me and only one instance in which Dad ever did so.

So quit trying to evade responsibility for your behavior by claiming that what you did was the result of "mistakes" or "misunderstanding". You were simply using me as a defenseless butt on which to take out your frustrations.

After my mid teens I never had a word of sympathy or moral support from you in anything, except when I was physically sick. During my earlier teens, unless sick, I never had any sympathy from you except sometimes when I went into a prolonged sulk as a result of your treatment of me. Then sometimes you would come to me and talk sympathetically and I would express some of my grievances and you would make vague promises of improvement. But your behavior to me never changed as a result of your promises.

Generally, if I experienced any failure or showed any weakness I found that I couldn't come to you for sympathy, because rather than giving me moral support you would show your disappointment in me. I was supposed to be your perfect little genius, so as to gratify your vanity, and you made it pretty clear that you didn't want to see any weaknesses or defects in me.

Do you remember how I was infatuated with

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that Radcliffe girl when I was at Harvard? I was in real pain over it, so much so that I was willing to write to you and Dad for moral support — in spite of the way you abused me and in spite of the fact that I had little reason to ~~expect~~ that I would actually get any moral support from you. Do you remember how you both reacted? Though an adolescent infatuation is normal enough, you both acted as if there were something wrong with me. There was no warmth or sympathy in your reply. Later, when I came home over the summer, I tried to talk to you about it personally. Your response was cold and embarrassed — you said only a few words. You were disappointed because your perfect little genius had shown a defect by getting stuck on a girl and being unable to do anything about it.* Of course, that was the last time I was ever foolish enough to look for any moral support from you or reveal any of my inner feelings to you.

Actually, up to a point, you did me a favor by denying me any moral support. By throwing me on my own inner resources you made me psychologically self-reliant. "What does not destroy me strengthens me." But in one vitally important respect I was destroyed rather than strengthened. In the social area I did need someone's help

*Actually, from your own point of view, you should have encouraged me to pursue this girl, since by your values she was very nearly perfect. She was exceptionally beautiful and highly intelligent

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and moral support. Since I didn't get it, my social self-confidence was pretty well destroyed.

Can't you grasp the magnitude of the harm that you, Dad, Miss Frye and Miss Skillen together did to me? I've never had a friend in my adult life (with the possible exception of our local librarian here, and that is by no means a close friendship — it can't be close, because she's a married woman), and I've never had a girlfriend (except Ellen Arl for a few months when I was 19, and I never could get along with her). Suppose that for a period of years whenever you touched — let us say — a banana, you got a severe electric shock. After that you would always be nervous around bananas, even if you knew they weren't wired to shock you. Well, in the same way, the many rejections, humiliations, and other painful experiences that I underwent during adolescence at home, in highschool, and at Harvard have conditioned me to be afraid of people. I'm always under stress when I'm around people, excepting only a very few people whom I've gotten used to through long association, and I'm never able to feel

(Footnote continued) and had a gentle, nice personality. She wore no makeup, jewellery, or fancy clothes, and even though she was pursued by many boys she never showed the least sign of vanity or arrogance. Best, from your point of view, was the fact that she was an orthodox believer in the liberal-intellectual ideology. But that's why she wouldn't have suited me. She was too passive and conforming — she'd apparently absorbed liberal-intellectualism

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that people are likely to accept me. This fear of rejection — based on bitter experience both at home and at school — has ruined my life, except for the few years that I spent alone in the woods, largely out of contact with people. That was a good way of life, and I was happy then, but that way of life has been ruined during the last 9 or 10 years because too many trees have been cut down, too many roads have been put in, and there are too many people here now.

You were good parents to me until I was about 8 or 9 years old. At about that time you, Ma, began to become excessively irritable and cranky. Whereas punishments had previously been more or less rational and inflicted with little anger, they now tended to degenerate into outbursts of ill-temper. At approximately the same time, coincidentally, many of the kids on our block, on Carpenter Street, stopped accepting me — I became an outsider with them. I'm not sure why this was so, but I think it may have been because I was too much of a good boy. For example, I remember one case when a bunch of kids lay in ambush for an old rag-picker and pelted him with garbage when he came by. I wouldn't participate in this — I hung back in the rear and immediately afterward went home to tell you about it

(Footnote continued) uncritically from her parents the way a good Catholic girl absorbs Catholicism. I think she was disappointed and a little shocked at my rejection of that ideology.

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because I was shocked at that kind of disrespect being shown to an adult.

But the problems at that time weren't yet serious — I was still getting along well with the kids in school, and you didn't begin shouting really vicious insults at me until I was maybe 11 or 12 years old.

When I was 11 that stupid old biddy Miss Frye arranged that I should skip a grade. You claim that Miss Frye said I was drawing pictures of violence during my spare moments in school. Actually, it was quite common for the other boys at that time and place to draw violent pictures — war scenes, shipwrecks, etc. I'm not aware that I drew violent pictures any more often than the other boys. Miss Frye may have thought I did, but I certainly wouldn't trust her judgement, since she was obviously a damn fool. Assuming for the moment that I really was drawing violent pictures more often than the other boys, which presumably would indicate hostile feelings on my part, what reason had she to assume that making me skip a grade would remove those hostile feelings? As a cause of hostile feelings she might have looked into the home situation, which was already bad at that time, though not as bad as it later became.

But whatever one may think of her decision to have me skip a grade, her behavior <u>after</u> I skipped a grade was inexcusable. I was not accepted by the

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older kids with whom I was put, and if Miss Frye was doing her job she should have been aware of this. Probably she was aware of it, and she should have told you about the problem and recommended that I should be taken out of that school and put in a different school. Why didn't she do so? The answer is pretty obvious. If you had to put me in a different school it would cause big problems for you, because either you'd have to pay the high costs of private schooling or you'd have to move to a new neighborhood — so of course she was afraid you would raise a big stink about it. To protect herself from criticism she kept me in a situation that had disastrous consequences for me. And you thought Miss Frye was so wonderful. Miss Frye says this, Miss Frye says that, Miss Frye says the other thing. The reason you thought Miss Frye was so wonderful was that she gratified your silly vanity by telling you that your kid was a "genius".

Miss Skillen also was aware that I was not accepted by the kids in school and she too should have advised you to take me out of that school and put me in a different one. She didn't do so because she wanted to satisfy her own needs by working with an unusually smart kid and sending him to Haward and all that crap.

Let me describe just one incident to show the kind of thing I had to endure in high school. One day in gym class the gym teacher, Mr. Megson,

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told the kids to divide themselves up into several teams and start playing basketball. Then he went out of the gym for a few minutes. When the kids chose their teams, nobody wanted me, so there was nothing I could do but go and sit by myself on the bleachers. Mr. Megson wasn't very bright — in fact, he was pretty dumb — but he was a kindly man, and when he saw me sitting by myself he came to me and asked me gently what was wrong. I told him simply that nobody wanted me on their team, so he took me and put me on one of the teams. The boy who was leading that group accepted me very grudgingly. (By the way, I am crying as I write this even though it all happened 35 years ago.) And then after going through a day of that kind of thing in school I would come home to have you and Dad scream at me that I was "sick", "immature", that I had "the mind of a two-year-old", etc., etc., etc.

For a kid of working-class origin who already had a serious problem with social rejection, Harvard was probably the worst possible school. You'll remember that I wanted to go to Oberlin, but you and Miss Skillen pressured me into going to Harvard. And don't give me any crap to the effect that you felt this would be best for me, blah blah blah. That's how you rationalized it to yourself, but the real motive was your own greed for prestige and status. You wanted to be able to brag. In fact, you repeatedly embarrassed me by foolishly bragging to

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everyone we met that "Teddy is going to Harvard this Fall!"

Harvard of course was very good academically, very stimulating intellectually, and it would have been alright for a kid of working-class origin who had good social skills and social self-confidence to start out with. The actual snobs were only a minority. The majority of the students were upper-middle-class types and they formed a social environment that was not congenial to a kid of working-class origin, but they were not necessarily snobs, and a kid of working-class origin who had good social skills could have found friends both among the upper-middle-class types and among the minority who were not upper-middle-class. But I had experienced so much rejection both at home and in school that I had very little social self-confidence. As a result, when my first attempts to make friends met with a cool reception, I just gave up and became solitary.

Incidentally, it's likely that the rejection I experienced at home and at school even affected me physically. In case you wonder why Dave is 3 inches taller than I am — I have read of 2 different studies that purport to show that rejection during adolescence tends to stunt growth.

By the time I graduated from Harvard at the age of 20 my social self-confidence was destroyed and I had passed through adolescence

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without learning the social skills that one normally learns during that period. Especially, I didn't know how to ask a girl for a date or how one is supposed to behave on a date. Your mother may have treated you worse than you treated me, and you may have experienced as much rejection during adolescence as I did, but, in the first place, that does not excuse the way you treated me, and, in the second place, it's easier for a woman because all she has to do is sit there and wait for a man to make advances to her, and once she gets a husband or boyfriend she can expect to meet other people through him. (I notice that all our old family friends came originally from Dad's circle.) A man has to ask a woman for a date, and if he's too shy to ask, then he gets no girlfriend. Or if his shyness makes him get flustered and awkward when he tries to speak to a woman, or if his ignorance of the relevant social conventions makes him do the wrong things, then the woman thinks he's a "geek" and doesn't want him.

Actually I find solitude congenial and can get by comfortably without male friendships. But women are another matter. Women are so beautiful! I'm not just talking about physical beauty. Women are gentle, nice, pleasant to be with; they represent warmth, joy, family life, love, and, of course, sex. Naturally, women have their faults, too, and moreover not all women have the good qualities I've just mentioned. But for 37 years I

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have desired women. I've wanted desperately to find a girlfriend or a wife but have never been able to make any progress toward doing so because I lack the necessary social self-confidence and social skills. I was reasonably free of these desires during the few years that I lived mostly isolated from the human race. I didn't see any women or have anything to remind me of them, so I was able to forget about them. But when in contact with people I've suffered acutely from frustrated desire for women.

It may be just as well that I didn't get married when I was young, because I probably would have been unhappy without the experiences I've had in the woods. The time for me to get married was when I was 36 years old — this was in 1978 and 1979, when I was staying with you in Lombard and working first at Foam-Cutting Engineers and later at Prince Castle. At that time I'd lived in the woods for about 7 years and my needs in that direction were adequately satisfied. I was very interested in getting married and in having a kid or two; and I was still relatively young. But I had no social skills and didn't know how to find a wife. I had a deep-seated conviction (a subjective, not an intellectual conviction) that I could never be successful with people, especially with women. So when my awkward attempts to meet women were unsuccessful, after a few months I lost all hope,

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and went back to the woods, where at least I wouldn't be tormented by being constantly reminded of women, sex, love, marriage, and children.

In recent years, because of the changes around here, it hasn't been practical for me to isolate myself as much as I used to, and I've often been nagged by desire for women. At times I've been attacked by outbreaks of intense desire for women — so intense that sometimes it is almost unendurable. The current outbreak is due to my having made the mistake of going to a woman doctor. This Dr. Goren is not pretty, but she gives the impression of being highly intelligent and capable, and, so far as I can judge on the basis of the half-hour or so of contact I had with her, I like her personality better than that of any other woman I've ever met (perhaps with one exception). Of course, the chances are she's married. And even if she's not married she probably wouldn't be interested in me, since I'm at the bottom of the social scale and I'm probably about ten years older than she is. And anyhow I wouldn't know how to go about making advances to her, and even if I did know how I probably wouldn't have the nerve.

If I'd had a normal adolescence I probably would have gotten married in my middle or late thirties and would be raising

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a kid now. As it is, I'm 49 years old, I'll be an old man in a few years, my life in the woods has been ruined by "progress", I have no wife, no kids, no friends, and nothing to look forward to but old age and death. I am tormented by bitter regret at never having had the opportunity to experience the love of a woman.

In one of your letters you gave me a little lecture about how I should "learn how to forgive". It's easy for you to preach, especially when you expect to be the beneficiary of the forgiveness. But I don't notice that you are particularly anxious to forgive your own parents. I hate you, and I will never forgive you, because the harm you did me can never be undone.

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